

Capacity to be Honest?

In the opening of Chapter Five in the Big Book (Alcoholics Anonymous), they say many things. One of them is that “There are those, too, who suffer from grave emotional and mental disorders, but many of them do recover if they have the capacity to be honest.”

Sounds hopeful, but what is the “Capacity to be Honest?”

A friend says in meetings that you cannot get “honest”. You stop lying. Honest is what is already true. We try to control what people think by hiding the truth.

Alcoholics (and addicts) are notorious for lying and they lie much better than “normal” people. We believe the lies are based in fear – fear of how a “truth” can be used as a weapon. There is a particular problem when the alcoholic/addict is asked a question and given no idea why the question is being asked. It can be something trivial, such as “what kind of gum are you chewing,” or something important.

When Do We Lie?

An alcoholic/addict will lie by reflex, even when telling the truth would help them or give them some benefit. Most lies will fall into one of the following categories.

The Basic Lie

The first lie is when you know that what you are saying is not what is true. It does not matter if you are trying to avoid consequences, or control someone else’s reactions to what is true. The questions are familiar and the lies used to answer them may be just as familiar.

“I didn’t do it.” (You know you did it.)

“I didn’t take it.” (You know you took it.)

“I was at my mom’s.” (You were at your girlfriend’s.)

“Someone stole my money.” (You know where you spent it.)

“I don’t know where it is.” (You know exactly where it is.)

These lies are as wrong as any other lie, but we try to convince ourselves that these lies aren’t that bad; . Or that it isn’t the Questioner’s business – that they have no right to ask.

The Inventive Lie

Another lie is when we do not know the answer, but make something up that we think will satisfy the person asking the question. We often tell ourselves this is for their benefit, - to keep them from getting upset, – but it is almost always for some self-serving reason.

“Oh, that was last year.” (You have no clue as to when it was, whatever it was.)

“My uncle did that.” (You have no idea who did it, or at least know your uncle had nothin nothing to do with it.)

“I saw it.” (You know you didn’t see anything.)

“I’m so sorry.” (You may be sorry you were caught, but not for what happened.)

The Self-Lie

Another lie is when we say something we believe is true, which. We think it is exactly the right thing to say., We are lying

to ourselves. We believe that we mean what we are saying even when what we believe has no basis in fact, no evidence from previous actions, and it outside our control.

“I will be there at 3:30PM tomorrow afternoon.” (You may mean it, but if you do not show up when you said you would, you lied.)

“I’ll never do it again.” (You may mean it when you say it, but you then do the it again.)

“I will help you clean out the storage space.” (You never show.)

“I’ll pay you out of my next check.” (You intend to, but by the time you get that check you have already come up with a good reason why you won’t pay it, and why they have no right to expect you to give them your money.)

Little White Lies

Most people believe that it is all right to tell “A Little White Lie.” We like to tell ourselves we are doing something good for the person hearing our lie, but when examined we find that what that we are protecting is ourselves.

There is no such thing. Lies are lies., tThey start at bright orange and work their way to the deepest, darkest lie you can imagine.

Making It a Lie

If you say you will do something, but the events change and you are unable to do it, your made a lie of something you thought was true, or wanted to be true, or intended to be true. It becomes a lie. Everyone has events that may prevent them from fulfilling a promise, or a commitment, but alcoholics/addicts will take a real situation and expand on it to make it a really good reason why they didn’t do what they say. They make the problem bigger., tThey

increase the numbers of people or time or distance.

They can take a simple commitment, decide not to do it, look for a good reason the other person will have to accept (because it is such a good reason), then make it better by increasing the magnitude, the number of people, the amount of time, and the distance.

They become self-righteous and angry when they have their new, bigger, better lie, being called a lie.

And an alcoholic/addict is never so angelic and outraged as when someone calls their lie a lie.

“How DARE you...”

When are we We Lying?

They are lies, even when you thought you telling the truth at the time.

When you say you will do something, thenand then do not do it, it is a lie.

When you say you will not do something, thenand then you do it, it is a lie.

When you come up with a reason to ignore a commitment, you have made a lie out of something that was previously true.

When you tell a Little White Lie, it is a lie.

What the Words Mean

At Dictionary.com it says:

true – adjective

1. *being in accordance with the actual state or conditions; conforming to reality or fact; not false: a true story.*
2. *real; genuine; authentic: true gold; true feelings.*
3. *sincere; not deceitful: a true interest in someone’s welfare.*

It doesn’t matter if it is a truth we like, or one that we agree with - – it only matters that it is true.

So what gets in the way of the truth?

A Lie. But what is the Lie? The same source defines a lie as a noun and as a verb. There are some definitions that do not relate to honesty, but the definitions that concern our honesty are:

lie – noun

1. *a false statement made with deliberate intent to deceive; an intentional untruth; a falsehood.*
2. *something intended or serving to convey a false impression; imposture: His flashy car was a lie that deceived no one.*
3. *an inaccurate or false statement.*
4. *something that is deliberately intended to deceive*

verb (used without object)

5. *to speak falsely or utter untruth knowingly, as with intent to deceive.*
6. *to express what is false; convey a false impression.*

verb (used with object)

7. *to bring about or affect by lying (often used reflexively): to lie oneself out of a difficulty; accustomed to lying his way out of difficulties.*

Throughout the Steps and the Program, we are called upon to participate in the leveling of Pride, the reduction of Ego, and discovering a new way of life.

Telling the Truth is an ego-defying act.

"No one among us has been able to maintain anything like perfect adherence to these principles..."

Joe A., Raleigh, NC



D.E.N.I.A.L.

For many years, people in AA and the other 12-Step programs have turned words into an "acronym" - - a literary device where each letter in the word becomes the first letter of a word. For example, "WHO" with the United Nations stands for World Health Organization. For divers, "S.C.U.B.A" stands for Self Contained Underwater Breathing Apparatus.

A common acronym heard in AA Meetings is "D.E.N.I.A.L." Which Stands for:

Don't
Even
Notice
I
Am
Lying

In the most common reading at the beginning of most

12-Step Meetings, "How it Works" it says:

"Those who do not recover are people who cannot or will not completely give themselves to this simple program, usually men and women who are constitutionally incapable of being honest with themselves. There are such unfortunates. They are not at fault; they seem to have been born that way. They are naturally incapable of grasping and developing a manner of living which demands rigorous honesty. Their chances are less than average. There are those, too, who suffer from grave emotional and mental disorders, but many of them do recover if they have the capacity to be honest."

Page 58

Lying has become a reflex for answering questions, getting out of a jam, or creating a little insulation when you don't know exactly why you are being asked a question. An alcoholic/addict will lie by reflex, even when telling the truth would help them or give them some benefit.

At one time the necessary requirement for membership was "an honest desire to stop drinking." In the Third Tradition, the word "honest" was removed because most people who come into the Program have no idea what "honest" means.